



STATE OF MICHIGAN

**FAMILY
INDEPENDENCE
AGENCY**

235 S. Grand Avenue
PO Box 30037
Lansing, MI 48909
Tel: (517) 373-2035
Fax: (517) 373-8471
www.mfia.state.mi.us

DOUGLAS E. HOWARD, Director



JOHN ENGLER, Governor

Ken Winter, Editor
Petoskey News-Review
319 State Street
P.O. Box 528
Petoskey, Michigan 49770

Dear Editor:

An April 30 article published in your newspaper entitled “Rights of Adults Need Protecting” contained information that is misleading and may cause prospective parents unnecessary concern. The article states that, “The state of Michigan is keeping a file on every new parent in the state. If it finds something it doesn’t like, it can seize your baby.” This assertion is inaccurate.

In the new birth match system, the name of the “new” parent(s) is matched against a database that contains the names of individuals who have had their parental rights to other children terminated—by order of the court—as a result of abuse and/or neglect. The parents’ names that do not result in a match are not maintained, and are not kept on file. The Family Independence Agency (FIA) has had the legal responsibility to pursue new births to families where parental rights have been terminated for some time. This is the first time the agency has been able to fulfill that obligation without depending on luck and outsider information.

If a match does occur between a new birth and parent(s) who previously had rights terminated, the name is forwarded to the appropriate local FIA office where they verify the identifying information and ensure the “new” parent(s) is same individual listed on the database. This is done to ensure that Children’s Protective Services efforts are focused on family situations that present potential risk to children.

After all verifications have occurred, an investigation is conducted to assure the safety and well being of the newborn. The newborn is not removed from the home simply because of the existence of parents’ past history of abuse and/or neglect. As with any case, Children’s Protective Services assesses the current situation to determine if the newborn is being abused and/or neglected. In many cases the end result of an investigation will be that the family is referred to voluntary supportive services, such as parenting classes. In some situations Children’s Protective Services will find a newborn that is being abused

and/or neglected. In these cases Children's Protective Services must approach the court and obtain an order before they can remove a child. This allows the parent(s) due process through the court system. Children's Protective Services cannot remove a child independent of the court process.

The birth-match process is in place as one additional mechanism to ensure—to the extent possible—the safety of newborns.

Sincerely,

Douglas E. Howard